10: Hilger E-5 (1946-1952) 1957
SG4 Araucanians SG4
Chile

DEATH, AND BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

OMENS OF DEATH

763 Death can be expected in a place near which nocturnal calls of certain animals are heard. In Alepúe area the cry of a fox indicates a death within a year; within several years after the call note of the pun'chiukü (bird) or that of the guadrado (bird) is heard. The guadrado's call note sounds like that of a kitten. (The interpreter explained: "Light at night is found in a Mapuche ruka only when there is a sick person in it. These birds are probably attracted by the light, fly toward it, and, of course, do their screeching there.") In all areas death is forecast by the nocturnal cries of an invisible bird known as choñchoñ, which also forecasts sickness (cf. pp. 109-110). "I had just come home from visiting a sick boy," said a non-Araucanian herbalist, "and was having a cup of tea. It was late in the evening. A young boy came running in to me, and in frightened tones said, 'I just heard the choñchoñ sing, and I know someone will die.' The sick boy whom I had visited died within a few hours. It is such coincidences that clinch beliefs."

CAUSES OF DEATH

761 Unless death is due to an accident, violence, or suicide, it is believed to be unfailingly the result of poisoning administered either directly or through witchcraft, "except in the early days when our men were also killed by the enemy." Usually, death follows sickness. Instant [278] death has been brought about, however, in Panguipulli area, by mixing a few drops of the venom of a frog found in the area, a potent poison, with food or drink. To obtain the venom, a number of live frogs are shaken vigorously in a drumlike container. Infuriated with this treatment, they spit forth a dark venom.

Poisonous commercial drugs are not known, generally. "I recall an instance in Villarrica," said a non-Araucanian, "where, at a Mapuche fiesta, a Chilean puma hunter showed Mapuche men strychnine that he used in his puma hunting; a Mapuche wanted to buy some. Instead of selling him strychnine, the Chilean sold him alum. Later the Chilean ate a meal, upon invitation, at the ruka of this Mapuche and drank there chicha in which the Mapuche had put the alum."

761 In Cofaripe it is believed that death will come upon a person who ● 215 lets himself be photographed, or "if he will not lose his life, he will lose something, something like his spirit. If my mother will not allow

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SG4 Araucanians SG4
Chile

you to photograph her while she sets up her loom, I shall set it up and let you photograph me. And I shall also prepare the warp and do a little weaving for you, so that you can get photographs with a weaver on them. My mother believes that if she is photographed she will have to die." Five young men talked with humor of having to die soon, since a picture had been taken of them.

761
215

DEATH

763

When it is evident that a person is dying, relatives are notified—that is, all those who bear the same name as his, or are of the same lineage. They stay with the bereaved family, and later near the dead person's remains, until the burial, except for such time as is needed to care for animals at home. During the days of waiting for death a cow or sheep belonging to the dying person is slaughtered by relatives and consumed; if necessary, a second one is slaughtered for the wake.

The dying person—man, woman, or child—is clothed in his best clothes. If his family adheres strictly to the old customs, a band will be put over the forehead of a man and tied in a knot on the side of his head, "like men formerly wore them." A woman's hair is held in position by means of her silver ornaments; her breast ornaments and stickpins are also worn. Feet are bare, unless the dying person has a pair of shoes. "I was present when a man dressed his dying wife in her jacket and skirt," said a non-Araucanian herbalist. "The man wanted to know from me whether he should put the women's best shoes on her or an older pair. I suggested the older pair, and that someone else might wear out the better pair. Just then the woman's mother came nearby and the man consequently put the best shoes on his wife." No facial or skin decorations were used.

During the present study a non-Araucanian herbalist was present at the death of a 17-year-old youth in Alepúe. What she then observed, she was later told, was traditional: When she arrived at the ruka, the young man, then dying, lay with feet toward the entrance of the ruka, which was also toward the fireplace. The entrance was the one generally used; on previous visits she had found the young man lying with feet toward the side entrance. The following relatives (the young man's father was deceased) were squatted in the ruka: the mother, maternal uncle and aunt, paternal uncle and granduncle. A neighboring man, his wife, and their young son were also present. The mother was at the left, near the head of her dying son; the herbalist was directed to sit in the corresponding place to the right at his head,